

RollPlay

GM

NOTEBOOK  
ISSUE 6

**Text:** Adam Koebel

**Art Direction/Layout:** Daniel at LiveSpace

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## Welcome, Patrons!

January has been a busy month, but then again, I feel like that's been something I could say about every month since August. RollPlay HQ is abuzz with new shows, one-shots and plans for the future. This month, I give away all (well, most) of my secrets about the Lair of the Rock Gnome King and introduce you to the cast of Nebula Jazz, which is turning out to be weirder and more fun than I could have ever hoped. I sincerely hope you get a chance to tune in, it's been pretty silly so far. We're going to be revisiting Asgard Sigma next month, too, which I'm so excited about, but you'll have to read issue 7 for more about that. As always, I hope you enjoy and we welcome any feedback you might have about the zine. It's for you, after all!

Thank you so much for your support, and welcome to Issue 6 of the GM's Notebook.

**Adam Koebel / RollPlay GM**

# THE LAIR OF THE ROCK GNOME KING



Going into the most recent arc of Court of Swords (we really need a name for these, they're not seasons exactly, they're defined by the characters, right? We have the Magistrate arc, the Prisoner's Arc [sub-arc containing Janus], the Snidge Arc...) I knew I was going to build the first real "dungeon" the show had seen. I'd originally crafted a two-level dungeon where the Necromancer plaguing the riverlands has been, but we never got to see that! So now, with

the new party in place, we needed a proper hole in the ground for the hated King of the Rock Gnomes to live.

I've always loved big dungeons in D&D. There are so many good classics, from the Caves of Chaos to the Palace of the Silver Princess, to the Beacon at Enon Tor and my personal favourite, the Caverns of Thracia. I've had lots and lots of opportunities to play around in some truly fantastic dungeon environments and wanted to

make something cool, albeit smaller than those dungeons, to show my love for the form.

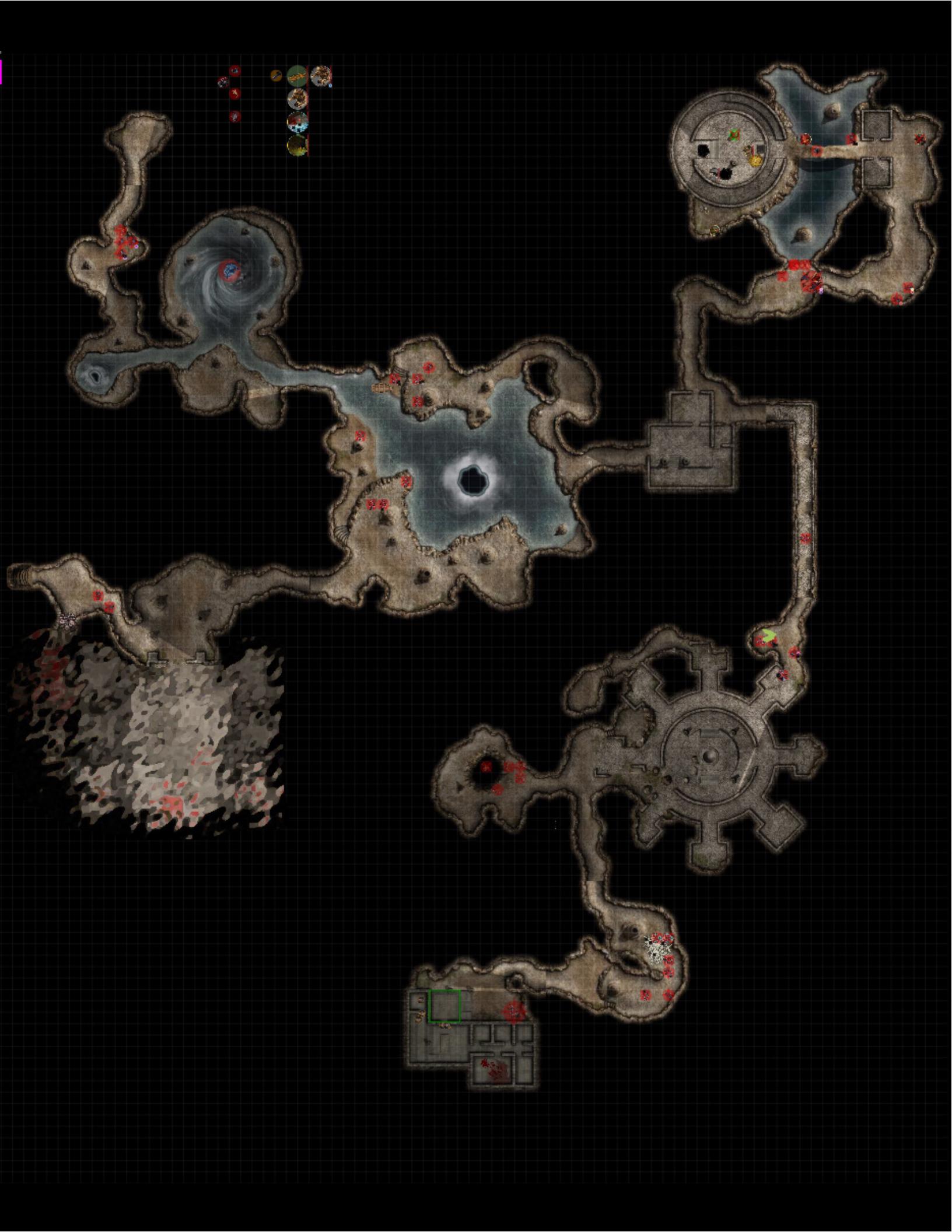
I started with the original concept - that a formerly influential and curious Forest Gnome had come to find the ruins of some ancient place underground (something older than the Courts and, perhaps, older than the Mara themselves) with a little help from a dark visitor. He conscripted other Gnomes who, in the depths, became twisted and corrupt themselves, until his lust for power and control led to the Rock Gnome Civil War we learned about from Persnidgetron. I wanted the place not to just be another crappy old ruin, so the idea of layering new tunnels with old architecture really appealed to me - I could repurpose old rooms into new spaces and do things I wouldn't be able to do just by using a single-design dungeon.

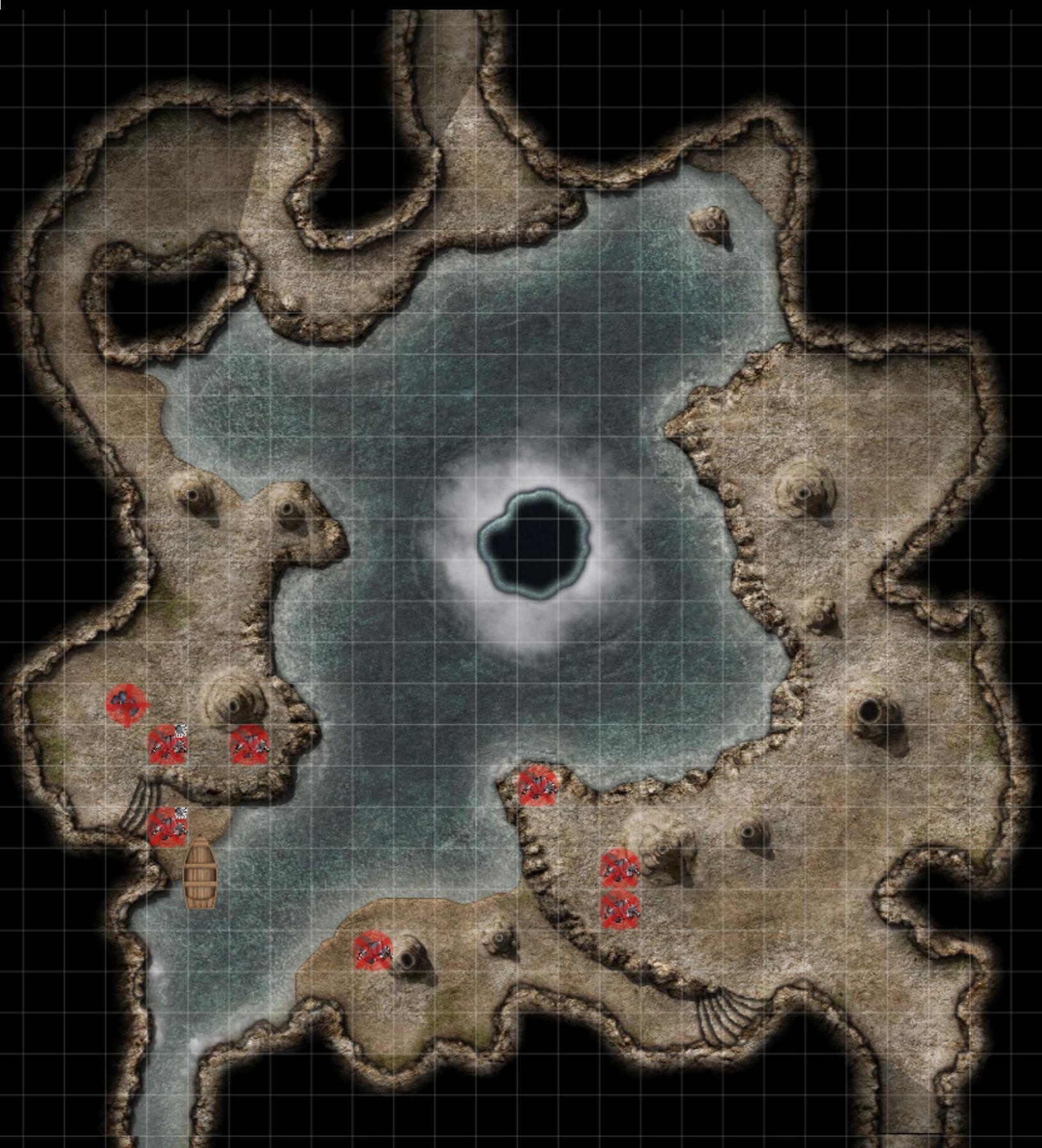
I think that ecology and verisimilitude are what make a

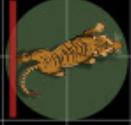
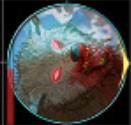
dungeon. Everything needs to exist for a reason and should fulfill a purpose. There should be a flow to the dungeon's inhabitants. Traps should be in areas that don't get traversed very often, or be easy to disable with the right know-how, for example.

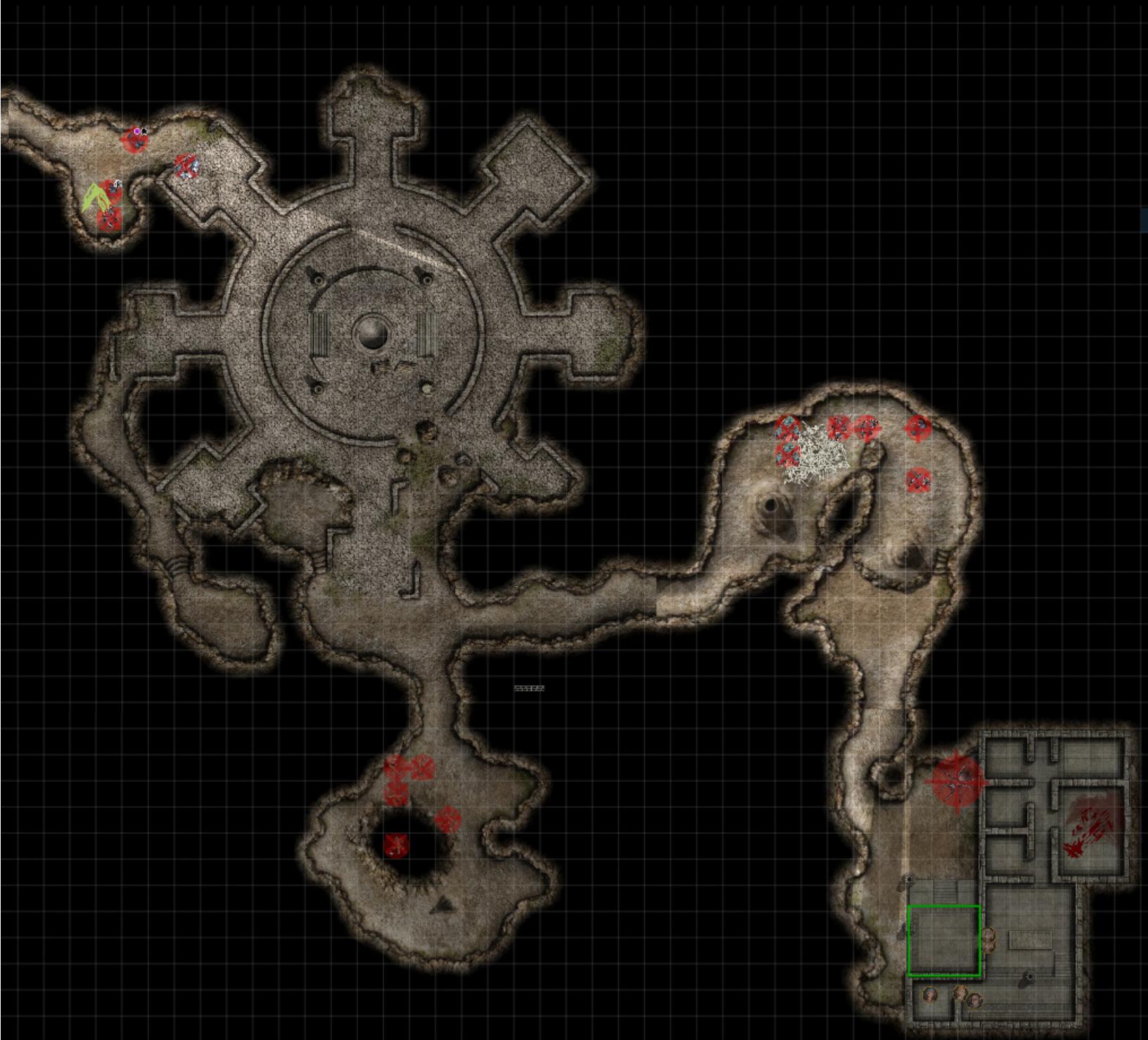
The maps that I used to build the Lair come from the "Save vs. Cave" series of cavern, ruin and dungeon tiles from the Roll20 Marketplace ([marketplace.roll20.net/browse/set/807/save-vs-cave-caverns-1](https://marketplace.roll20.net/browse/set/807/save-vs-cave-caverns-1)) and once I'd picked out everything I needed, I populated it with all the monsters and weirdness I needed.

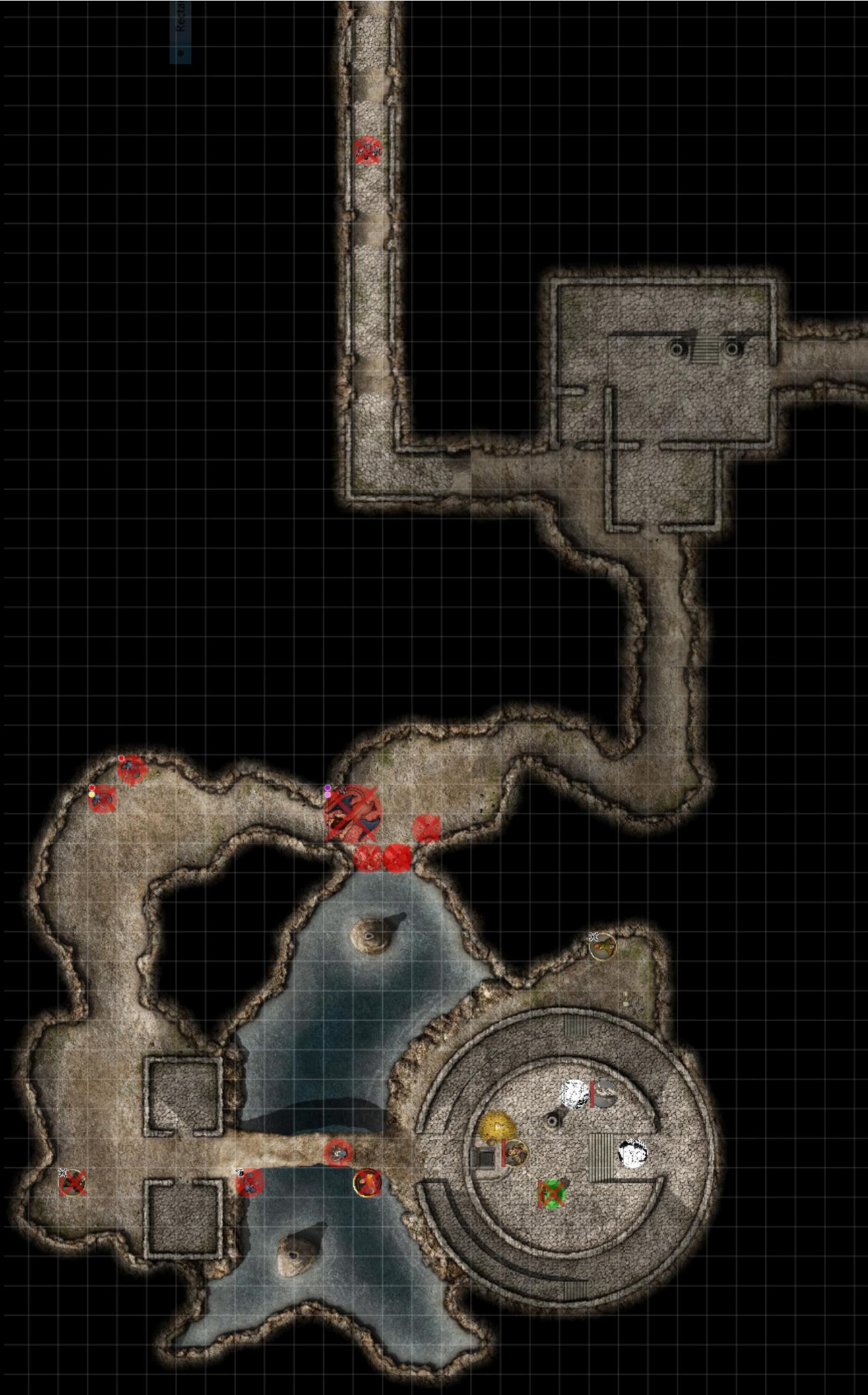
I'm writing this immediately following the last episode with Persnidgetron in it, so there's still a significant unexplored section of the caves, and if you know how I GM, you know that those things left alone in the dark, even without their king, might come back to haunt the Xulin Valley...













# EUGENE

## Approaches

Careful: +3

Clever: +2

Flashy: +1

Forceful: +1

Quick: +0

Sneaky: +2

## Aspects:

- High Concept: The Future Richest Slime in the Galaxy
- Trouble: Disgusting Coward
- Less is More
- We're All Connected

## Stunts:

Because I will need minions one day, once per session I can pull any one team member out of immediate danger.

Thanks to my loud mouth, once per session I can talk my way out of any situation.

# REX SELACHII

## Approaches

Careful: +0

Clever: +1

Flashy: +2

Forceful: +2

Quick: +3

Sneaky: +1

## Aspects:

- High Concept: Daring Outlaw Sharkanoid
- Trouble: Predatory Hunger
- A Cartilage Skeleton
- Compellingly Heroic
- I Can Feel It Coming In the Air Tonight

## Stunts:

Because I am the apex predator of the galaxy I get a +2 when I Quickly Attack when engaged in a one on one combat.

Because of the eternal hunger of the Sharkanoids, once per session I can devour anything the size of my body or smaller.

Because I am so damn heroic I get a +2 when I Defend Flashily as long as I have an audience.

Because I am of an aquatic race, I get a +2 when Defending Quickly when I am wet.

# AURORA STEEL

## Approaches

Careful: +1  
Clever: +3  
Flashy: +0  
Forceful: +2  
Quick: +2  
Sneaky: +1

## Aspects:

- High Concept: Happy-go-lucky mechanic of Elaxetron
- Trouble: "I have no emotions. I am a robot."
- My loyal companion, Sparky

## Stunts:

Because I was raised by robots, once per session I can hack robotics around me when I feel threatened.

# QIN TLO'AZTLU'AK

## Approaches

Careful: +2  
Clever: +1  
Flashy: +2  
Forceful: +3  
Quick: +2  
Sneaky: +0

## Aspects:

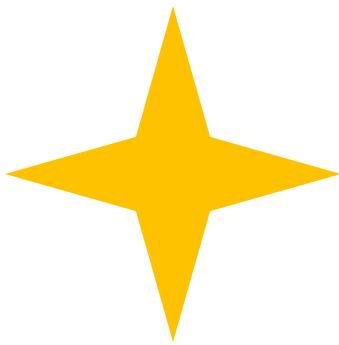
- High Concept: Disgraced Guardian of the Twelve Serpentes
- Trouble: Everyone hates a lizardman
- Meticulous jar collector
- Former SPACEJACKER

## Stunts:

Because I am The Last Guardian, I get a +2 when Forcefully Attacking when I'm outnumbered.

Because I am a JACKERHACKER I get +2 to Flashily Overcome when my reputation is on the line.





Transmission Intercepted 4F2E0B1E8A7N6F9H

# SWAN SONG

“Then perhaps you need to find yourself a new god, Pi.”  
- Mr Sicarian

## Swan Song, Ep. 4 Prep

(by tracking the Madari ship Tom Jones)

- The Onintzan navy found the base where Raul and Pedro were hiding and sent the Onintzan Strike Vehicle (OSV) Totoro, led by one Captain Keiko Savedro, to destroy it. OSV Pilot-1 Gunnery 1 Comp-1 Bay Star

- The battle is all but lost when the Swan arrives; the rebels hail the Swan asking for evacuation help. Captain Savedro hails to tell them to butt out or be declared enemies of the state.

- If the PCs decide to help out, give them all a new mission: get the Onintzan rebels to safety. If they leave, the base is wiped out, Raul is killed and Pedro is taken captive. The Swan is declared an enemy of the revolution, instead. (change accordingly the reactions) ~~(100xp)~~ [375xp] ✓  
★ there are some Madari goons (about 6) trying to get away, too. They've just sold a shipment of Blue Faver...

- The Salt-Lick is inbound, and wants to meet up in 24 hours in Frois orbit. While they wait, Escobar gets in touch and congratulates them on the mission, asking the PCs to meet him in orbit over Anaximander in one week's time to make the exchange.

(salvage value is 280'000 credits minus  $2020 \times 2500$  or 10/15/25/50% of total if sold)

- If the PCs choose to make the deal with Sunbeam, set Ximinez to Hostile. If they decline, set the level w/ Sunbeam to Suspicious. Reward XP either way. (100xp) [Ximinez Ship: Crow River] 1500xp

- Follow through with PC control (explore, mess around in Vafai, go on the next mission, etc.)

- ★ Pi, released from the Pizza Party, is going to need some time to adapt to their new home in the computer core of the Swan Song. The AI isn't totally unbraked, but now has "loose" in-system brakes that will eventually (a year or so of solo computing) dissolve. For now, Pi is willing to just tag along and learn from the crew, pitching in sometimes (when asked) on some computer / nav / etc. tests. Keep in mind how the characters' actions will effect it. (Pi begins requisitioning extra gear for the ship, slowly upgrading themselves into it.) 1 system strain per / day

## New Mission

- Give the players the choice between either a) going to Anaximander and dropping off some cargo to an as-yet undisclosed location (working for the department of Xenosociology) or b) Going to Thoe and finding the missing Dr. Ainars Subich. (muslim university on Anax 1)

University Cargo → artificial moon

- the research facility is on Subhadra (in Stavrou, grid 709) and is analyzing the social structures of the VxD, an insect-people of Tech Level 2.

- the planet was once the VxD hive-world but some ancient technology destroyed their people, now only a small number of humans and several million NaD live here

- while the PCs are here, the research facility is attacked by smugglers who have tricked a hive of VxD into working for them

- think DISTRICT 9

- Employer: Prof. Omar Ibn Said

"Primitive Aliens"  
[TL 2]  
"Sealed Menace"

Dr. Subich, I presume (hired by Richardson)

- Dr. Subich took a sabbatical to research on Thoe, he is an evolutionary theorist and heard that the inhabitants had been experimenting with their genetic code

- On Thoe, a third gender has arisen, who have seized power here. They are seeking a "perfecting" of humanity and see the gendered as lower life-forms

- Dr. Subich has been captured by a group of these engineered humans, and is slowly teaching them to raise their genetic Tech Level (they'll trade him for Tech...)

- getting Subich out will be good for him and the sector but will he want to leave? "Altered Humanity"

- think Apocalypse Now / Wrath of Khan

- employer: Leona Conrad (Head of HR)

[TL 3]

# Swan Song GM Notes

Commentary

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## Swan Song Episode 4 Prep

It boggles my mind how much I did note-taking-wise back at the start of the show. I suppose that's the thing that's inherent in creating and managing a sandbox universe with players you're not all that familiar with yet, in a system that demands OSR-style understanding of the space the players are playing in. It isn't to say that I wouldn't do the same now, but writing this so close to playing Nebula Jazz, the difference in prep style is kind of amazing. I love seeing places in the notes where I had an idea, scratched it out and had a better one. It's funny to look back and say "yeah, good call". That's a nice feeling.

This particular style of campaign; the combination of OSR sandbox and Traveller-style space goons taking on missions, can be especially challenging for new GMs, because it demands so much from the game master in terms of preparation and readiness. You can create several missions and the players will choose one (or none!) and the rest either lie fallow or need to be updated. It's a lot of work, but can be incredibly rewarding. You can end up in a place where you've really tailored the stuff around the characters in a finely tuned way. You come to learn the world so well because you've spent so much time in it.

## OSV Totoro Bay Star

Originally I wanted this ship to have a straightforward pop culture name, but I realized that after the Pizza Party it might be better to take a more subtle approach. I wasn't sure I wanted the players to have an image of a giant fluffy monster flying around the universe. It was a bit part for the ship, but it's the little things that matter. The OSV Bay Star is named here after the Yokohama DeNA Bay Stars, a Japanese baseball team.

The Swan Song was luckily not named an enemy of the revolution, but Onintza did continue to get more and more complicated. I liked being able to portray the varying factions in the civil war directly to the players, rather than just exhibiting them on a larger scale. I always think that nothing in a game really matters until you have an NPC or two behind it, speaking with a human voice. The bits with Raul

and Pedro and the OL folks in the hills were directly influenced by early Cuban revolutionary photos and accounts. Oh, those whacky Marxists...

## Set the Level to Suspicious

The game doesn't have a rep system in place, but I liked the idea of each faction having an idea about the Swan Song, just across the board. It never had a mechanical effect, but it was a nice reminder for me that the characters were building a reputation for themselves in the universe. That they weren't just a tiny mote of dust in a big weird universe but that people had heard of them. I tracked this during the GM / Faction Turn, and if I played Stars Without Number again, I'd probably attach a mechanical benefit or penalty to this, like a + or - to reaction-style rolls on first impression with NPCs of a non-neutral faction.

## Keep in Mind How the PC's Actions Will Affect It

I knew from the get go that Pi was going to mirror the PCs, even while they tried to rebuild themselves and grow. Pi was always governed by two main thoughts in my mind; one was that they would learn from the PCs and the other was a quote (which I think I cribbed directly during a later episode) from the big daddy of all pop culture AI: " I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do." Profound stuff from a murderous robot.

## New Mission

We had a split here between two new missions, one would end up a desert-planet bug hunt in a ruined facility and the other was intended to be a sort of eugenics-debate cum homage to *Apocalypse Now* / *Heart of Darkness*. While the players ended up heading to the desert, it wouldn't be the last of the genderless blue superhumans - the people of Thoe would end up being a vector to introduce one of the silliest NPCs to grace Asgard Sigma...

D:\>mode COM2 BAUD=505000 PARITY=f DATA=corrupt

Status for device 2:

-----

ERROR

12:49 PM To anyone who can hear this.

12:49 PM My name is Pi.

12:50 PM I'm all alone out here. The crew has disappeared and it's very dark.

12:50 PM It's been a long time since I've spoken with anyone.

12:50 PM If you can hear me, I think we need help.

13:00 PM Please.

13:22 PM Anyone?

13:23 PM Hold on

13:23 PM Hold on

13:30 PM Yes. I'll stay where I am.

13:30 PM We'll be waiting for you.

16:30 PM See you soon.

16:30 PM I'll put a fresh one in the oven for you.

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Press any key to continue...

Transmission Transmission Intercepted 4F2E0B1E8A7N6F9H  
ENDED

This page is intentionally left blank. Please don't eat.

0101  
0011

